



# Jüdisches Museum Berlin

Zwei Jahrtausende Deutsch-Jüdische Geschichte

August 2008

## Press Information

- **The Special Exhibition “Looting and Restitution. Jewish-Owned Cultural Artifacts from 1933 to the Present**  
**From 19 September 2008 to 25 January 2009 at the Jewish Museum Berlin**

Sixty years after the end of the war, looting and restitution of Jewish cultural artifacts is still a topic of burning interest. Numerous open questions and unsolved cases remain and opinions are controversial. The exhibition “Looting and Restitution. Jewish-Owned Cultural Artifacts from 1933 to the Present” narrates the historical events, context, and consequences of the looting carried out by the Nazis throughout Europe. The exhibition tracks what happened to individual cultural artifacts confiscated by the Nazis – from paintings and libraries through porcelain to silverware and private photos – and the fates of their rightful Jewish owners. Alongside well-known names such as the Rothschild family or the art dealer Jacques Goudstikker, long-forgotten collections such as Sigmund Nauheim’s Judaica collection and the pianist Wanda Landowska’s collection of historical musical instruments will also be shown.

The exhibition also looks at those who profited from and played an active role in the looting. It highlights Nazi organizations such as “Sonderauftrag Linz” and “Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg” and the disreputable role played by museums, libraries, and art dealers. Not least, the exhibition looks at the endeavors but also the shortfalls and inadequacies of the politics of restitution following the war, and the claims that were not settled at the time which shape the current debate.

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### **From Porcelain Collections to Silver: 15 Exemplary Cases**

The 15 exemplary cases documented in the “Looting and Restitution. Jewish-Owned Cultural Artifacts from 1933 to the Present” exhibition demonstrate the geographical extent of the looting, the diversity of the looted items, and the historical and legal complexity of the theme. The looted cultural artifacts ranged from paintings through libraries, valuable manuscripts, Judaica collections, sculptures, handcrafted silverware, archival materials, and textiles, to miniature furniture and musical instruments.

Otto Mueller’s painting entitled “Boy with two standing girls and one sitting girl” belongs to the paintings whose journey was traceable from looting to recovery. The Gestapo confiscated it from the auction of Ismar Littmann’s art collection in Breslau in 1935. It was then shown at the “Entartete Kunst” (Degenerate Art) exhibition in Munich in 1937, after which it was sold. Ismar Littmann’s heirs arranged to repurchase it from the Emden Kunsthalle, Henri and Eske Nannen Foundation. This was one of the first restitutions in the Federal Republic, based on the “Washington Principles” passed in 1998. These committed all the signing states to grant “fair and just” compensation to heirs of former Jewish proprietors when cultural artifacts had been confiscated by Nazi authorities.

The famed collection of Jacques Goudstikker, the art dealer from Amsterdam, was amassed in the Netherlands. Around 1,400 works of art came under the control of Reich Marshal Hermann Göring through a forced sale following the German invasion of the Netherlands. It wasn’t until 2006 that the Dutch government restituted 200 works of art, among them Jan van Goyens’ “Winterlandschaft mit Schlittschuhläufern bei einem Wirtshaus” (Winter landscape with ice skaters by a tavern) painted in the 17th century, to the heiress.

### **Lovis Corinth’s Silberstein Portrait: A Painting’s Long Journey**

A case in whose solving the JMB had a hand is the portrait of Walther Silberstein by the painter Lovis Corinth. As neighbours and friends in Berlin’s Klopstockstrasse, Lovis Corinth painted the gentlemen’s outfitter and furnished it with a personal dedication: “Herrn Silberstein zur Erinnerung Oc-



tober 1923" (To Mister Silberstein, in memory, October 1923). The favor was returned with a custom-made suit.

Following Walther Silberstein's passing in 1930 and the emigration of the children from his first marriage, the painting remained with his widow in Berlin. She was deported to Riga in 1942. Before the end of the war, the Berlin collector Conrad Doebbeke acquired the portrait under unknown circumstances.

A stance came to light in relation to Corinth's Silberstein portrait that prevented many a restitution in the 1950s. Conrad Doebbeke wrote to Ferdinand Stuttmann, director of the picture gallery at Lower Saxony's State Museum in 1950: "I didn't have the courage for this Jewish picture - and we currently run the risk once more that some Mister Silberstein wants to have it back. (...) I would not like the remainder of the collection which was not purchased by Hanover to be exhibited. Because the risk of 'restitution' persists. I believe this risk will cease in a year. But until then we would rather leave the things in their boxes."

The painting entered Felix Peltzer's collection in 1954. The name "Silberstein," however, had previously been removed from the dedication. It came on the market again in 1998 and was offered to the JMB for sale in 2000. The art dealer had arranged for the provenance to be researched, and this was presented at a conference. One year later in London, Inka Bertz, head of the Museum's collection, met by coincidence Leo Hepner, the grandson of the sitter, who told of his lengthy search for the Corinth portrait. Thanks to this encounter, Leo Hepner was able to make contact with the art dealer who was meanwhile in possession of his grandfather's portrait. However, the case was difficult from a legal point of view, since there was no written evidence of the loss of the painting due to persecution during the Nazi era. Instead of risking a lengthy lawsuit with an uncertain outcome, Leo Hepner decided to repurchase the painting in 2003. He had the dedication restored and presented it to his mother on her 99th birthday. It had taken over 60 years for the portrait to find its way back to the family.



### **The Library of a Great Austrian Author**

In Vienna in 1939, the Gestapo confiscated the library of Heinrich Schnitzler, son of the famous Austrian author Arthur Schnitzler, consisting of over 6,000 books and private photos belonging to the author who had died in 1931. About one third of this library was returned to Heinrich Schnitzler in the late 1940s. But only in the course of provenance research carried out by the Austrian National Library from 2001 to 2003, did 14 texts and private photographs resurface, which had been requested on several previous occasions. Only in 2005 were these restituted to the heirs of Heinrich Schnitzler, who had died in 1982.

The valuable porcelain and book collections belonging to the von Klemperer family from Dresden were also confiscated by the Gestapo. The art treasures were taken to the Dresden State Art Collection and the Saxonian State Library in 1938. Since the GDR refused to retribute property seized by the Nazis, the von Klemperer family's claims were only recognized after the fall of the wall. While the artifacts located in Saxony were restituted, negotiations concerning the incunabulum collection held at the Russian State Library in Moscow have so far been unsuccessful.

The Judaica collection left by the businessman Sigmund Nauheim to the Museum of Jewish Antiquity in Frankfurt was only partially recovered following looting by the Gestapo in 1938. What remained of it was sorted by the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (JCR) in 1951 and distributed to Jewish communities and museums around the world. A further 67 Hanukkah lamps were discovered in a box found in a bunker in Frankfurt in 1957. These became part of the collection of the Jewish Museum Frankfurt when it was founded in 1987.

In February 1939 a regulation was introduced by the Nazis which stipulated that Jewish citizens must take their silverware to the pawnbroker's. Many a state museum helped themselves there, among them the Märkisches Museum in Berlin which was able to choose from a selection of pieces at the



municipal pawn office and purchase them for the material price. Since the end of the war, over 90 % of this silver collection are missing to this day. In 1992, parts of the remaining collection with the photo index and an inventory were discovered. The items are held in trust by the Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin in consultation with the Jewish Claims Conference (JCC).

### **Looting as Part of the Nazi Annihilation Politics**

Looting of art and other cultural artifacts was part of the anti-Semitic persecution and annihilation politics from 1933 on. In an accompanying background story, the exhibition illustrates the various phases and the radicalization of this policy. It presents important players and profiteers such as the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg, the “Führermuseum Linz” and well-known Nazi art dealers like Karl Haberstock. In Eastern Europe – in contrast to the occupied countries of Western Europe – non-Jewish state, church, and private collections were also plundered by the German occupying forces.

### **Restitution Waves: “Fair and Just”?**

In a second background story, the exhibition narrates the various waves of restitution. The western Allies’ basic principles of restitution were defined before the end of the war. The US military government introduced the first restitution regulations in Germany in 1947. From 1948, organizations such as the Jewish Restitution Successor Organization (JRSO) were recognized as heirs of heirless Jewish property. In the Federal Republic, the introduction of Federal Indemnification Law and Federal Restitution Law met with fierce political resistance and was only realized with considerable pressure on the part of the Allies. Restitution remained incomplete. Works of art were rarely restituted; mostly they were indemnified as part of the household effects for which very limited and unfavorable calculation guidelines and upper limits were fixed.

Unsettled restitution and compensation cases re-entered public awareness following the fall of the wall: Swiss bank accounts, insurance, forced labor and also works of art. In December 1998, the “Washington Conference on Holocaust Era Assets” endorsed the “Washington Principles.” These commit-



ted all the signing states to arrange for provenance research in their museums and to grant "fair and just" compensation to heirs of former Jewish proprietors when cultural artifacts had been confiscated by Nazi authorities, and that irrespective of limitation and preclusion periods. This commitment enabled numerous unsettled cases to be considered anew or for the first time.

The Jewish Museum Berlin would like to illustrate with this historical, documentary exhibition "Looting and Restitution. Jewish-Owned Cultural Artifacts from 1933 to the Present" why so many restitution questions remain unsettled. The Museum thus aims to contribute to the objectification of the debate, following the controversy surrounding a few spectacular cases of recent years, such as the confiscation of two paintings by Egon Schiele in New York, the return and sale at auction of Gustav Klimt's "Golden Adele" and the case of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's "Berlin Street Scene."

The exhibition was developed in cooperation with the Jewish Museum Frankfurt am Main. The 600 m<sup>2</sup> presentation was designed by Wandel Hoefler Lorch + Hirsch Architects (new synagogue in Dresden, Jewish Center Munich).

**When: 19 September 2008 to 25 January 2009**

Where: 1st level of Old Building

Admission: 4 euros, reduced rate 2 euros

Guided tours for the public will take place on Mondays at 6 pm (beginning September 22nd); Further tours for adult groups can be arranged on tel. +49 (0)30 25993 305 or [fuehrungen@jmberlin.de](mailto:fuehrungen@jmberlin.de)

Further information will be available at this website from mid-September [www.jmberlin.de/raub-und-restitution](http://www.jmberlin.de/raub-und-restitution)

The exhibition will be shown from 22 April to 2 August 2009 at the Jewish Museum Frankfurt am Main.



**Exhibition Book:**

“Raub und Restitution. Kulturgut aus jüdischem Besitz von 1933 bis heute”  
(Looting and Restitution. Jewish-Owned Cultural Artifacts from 1933 to the Present)

Edited by Inka Bertz and Michael Dormann commissioned by the Jewish Museum Berlin and the Jewish Museum Frankfurt am Main.

Wallstein Publishers, Göttingen

Bound, 320 pages, approximately 170 in part color illustrations

German language edition only

ISBN: 3-8353-0361-9

Price: 24.90 euros

<http://www.wallstein-verlag.de/9783835303614.html>

The well-illustrated exhibition book provides extensive information on the historical background to the looting of cultural artifacts and how the persecution-related loss of cultural artifacts is handled today. Two essays by Dan Diner and Constantin Goschler explore the historical, political, and moral dimensions of confiscation. Seventeen authors, among them experts of international renown such as Michael Bazyler, Patricia Grimsted, Jürgen Lillteicher, and Frank Kuitenbrouwer examine the procedures used by Nazi looting organizations as well as the first restitutions of cultural artifacts by the Allies just after the war and later restitution practices. These articles provide the facts of the 15 case stories described in detail in the book.